

RESEARCHUPDATE

BUTLER CENTER FOR RESEARCH AUGUST 2012

College Binge Drinking

Colleges and universities are taking a closer look at alcohol consumption by students, and for good reason: Binge drinking rates remain high, and the harmful consequences of binge drinking interfere with learning. University officials and scientists are working together to develop and test interventions to reduce binge drinking among students.

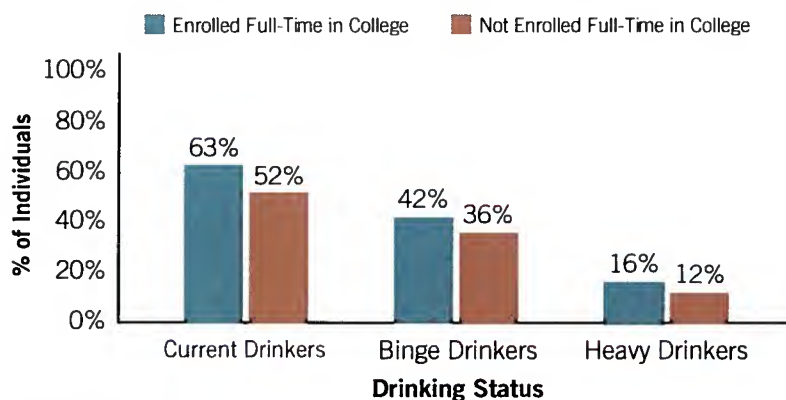
There are several evidence-based interventions currently used by colleges across the U.S. to decrease the frequency of college binge drinking and increase awareness of the deleterious effects of heavy drinking. These interventions range from attempting to correct widely held misperceptions regarding social norms of college drinking to more intensive counseling-based interventions that incorporate motivational interviewing sessions. One type of intervention is called screening and brief intervention (SBI) and involves administering a screening tool for assessing an individual's level of high-risk drinking and then administering brief feedback and guidance encompassing social norms clarification, motivational enhancement to modify drinking, and cognitive-behavioral skills training to prevent further alcohol misuse.¹ Universities use a variety of methods to deliver these interventions, such as individualized or group meetings (delivered by counselors, peers, or academic advisors), the Internet, pamphlets, and courses.

Prevalence of Binge Drinking Among College Students

How common is binge drinking among college students in the United States? According to SAMHSA's 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 42.2% of full-time college students engaged in binge drinking in the past month, compared to 36.6% of peers who were either part-time students or not enrolled in college. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, a greater percentage of full-time college students were also more likely to report current use of alcohol and heavy drinking in the past month compared to individuals not enrolled in college full time.² Importantly, these differences have remained fairly consistent since 2002 (see Figure 2).³

SAMHSA also found that the frequency of treatment admissions for alcohol abuse among 18- to 24-year-olds in 2009 was 46.6% among college students compared to 30.6% among nonstudents from the same age group.⁴ The frequency of treatment for substance abuse was higher for alcohol compared to heroin, other opiates, cocaine, and methamphetamine⁵, suggesting that the college experience is associated with vulnerability toward alcohol abuse.

Figure 1: Alcohol use among 18- to 22-year-olds as a function of college enrollment



Source: SAMHSA 2011 NSDUH

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THE HAZELDEN EXPERIENCE

A substantial number of high school and college-age people receive alcohol/drug treatment from Hazelden each year. In 2011, 678 young people ages 15–22 received residential treatment at Hazelden in Plymouth and 87 received intensive outpatient treatment at Hazelden in Chicago. Hazelden is currently in the process of expanding its Plymouth facility to include intensive outpatient programming for youth and extended care programming for both young women and young men. Analyses of treatment outcomes data for youth attending Hazelden programs consistently show dramatic improvement in reducing substance use and in improving quality of life and academic functioning in the year following treatment.

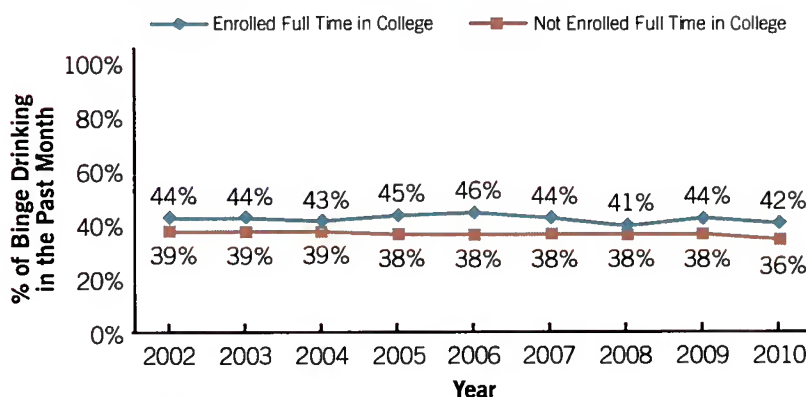
TRIBECA TWELVE COLLEGIATE RECOVERY RESIDENCE

Hazelden understands the challenges and needs of college students who are in recovery. To address these needs and provide a supportive, recovery-oriented environment for these students, Hazelden has opened Tribeca Twelve, an alcohol and drug-free recovery house in the Tribeca neighborhood of New York City. Tribeca Twelve offers a safe and supportive living environment where students can focus on their recovery and academic goals. Residents share newly renovated condominium space with other students who are in recovery. Residents are offered individual counseling, an individualized recovery plan, coordination of care with independent treatment providers, peer support, and a number of other activities designed to support and foster their recovery. Hazelden also offers intensive outpatient treatment and continuing care programming at the Tribeca facility for Tribeca Twelve residents as well as other individuals in the community. For more information about Tribeca Twelve, please visit hazelden.org.

HOW TO USE THIS INFORMATION

- **University Officials:** Investigate binge drinking problems on your campus and advocate for empirically based interventions.
- **Students:** When choosing a college, be sure to inquire about alcohol consumption on campus, consequences experienced by students as a result of alcohol use, and institutional efforts to combat binge drinking.
- **Health Care Providers:** Exposure to excessive consumption of alcohol warrants screening and intervention for alcohol problems among college-age health care seekers.

Figure 2: Binge drinking among adults ages 18–22 as a function of college enrollment: 2002–2010



Source: SAMHSA 2011 NSDUH

The Consequences of Binge Drinking

Binge alcohol use causes specific and serious problems for students. The immediate pharmacological effects of alcohol consumption impair motor ability, alter judgment, and decrease self-control and inhibitions. Acute or chronic alcohol abuse may lead to academic problems, relationship problems, legal troubles, and physical and mental health complications. Mallett, et al., (2006) asked 169 students attending a public northeastern university whether they experienced certain alcohol-related consequences within the past year. Eighty-one percent experienced a hangover, 72% blacked out, 32% arrived late to work or school, 29% had unintended sexual intercourse, 14% received a poor grade on a test, and 12% drove while drinking or following an episode of heavy drinking.⁴ In another study of college students attending 5 colleges in the U.S. and Canada, male students who consumed 8 or more drinks per day and female students who consumed 5 or more drinks per day were at increased risk of an alcohol-related injury (e.g., sprained ankle, fender bender, and bad falls).⁵ Furthermore, males and females who reported binge drinking at least 4 days per month were five times more likely to be injured relative to students who drank less.⁶ These data are especially troubling in light of evidence indicating that college students who engage in binge drinking often fail to learn from the negative consequences they experience and frequently underestimate the level of their intoxication.⁷

Strategies to Decrease Binge Drinking at Colleges

Recognizing that binge drinking on college campuses is a detriment to students' health and education, higher education officials are implementing programs to educate students and change drinking norms. Scientific studies of interventions to reduce binge drinking have produced some encouraging results. In a randomized controlled trial, 677 college students who violated campus alcohol policies were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 alcohol use reduction interventions: 1) a brief motivation intervention, 2) a computer-based intervention program that emphasizes responsible social decision making with regard to drinking, 3) an online course with quizzes, interactive exercises, and journaling opportunities, and 4) a delayed intervention condition (students had their choice of intervention following a one-month delay). The results of the study indicated that male students showed a decrease in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems following all three interventions.⁷ Female students showed a reduction in consumption of alcohol and alcohol-related problems in the delayed intervention and brief motivation conditions. These data suggest that several different types of interventions can be effective in curbing problematic alcohol use among students.

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The Butler Center for Research informs and improves recovery services and produces research that benefits the field of addiction treatment. We are dedicated to conducting clinical research, collaborating with external researchers, and communicating scientific findings.

Justin J. Anker, Ph.D., Research Scientist
Patricia Owen, Ph.D., former Director

If you have questions, or would like to request copies of Research Update, please call 800-257-7800 ext. 4405, email butlerresearch@hazelden.org, or write BC 4, P.O. Box 11, Center City, MN 55012-0011.

References

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